



April 2004

Sustainable Agriculture Technical Note 2

Marketing Tips for Sustainable Agriculture

A practical way to support sustainable agriculture

By: Stefanie Aschmann and Jason Murphy



Contents:

Introduction	2
What is Marketing?	2
Developing a Marketing Strategy and Plan	3
Techniques for Marketing	5
Public Relations and Advertising	16
For More Information	16
Case Studies	18

For more information contact
USDA NRCS Watershed Science Institute
c/o NAC, UNL-East Campus, Lincoln, NE 68583-0822
(402) 437-5778 ext. 43, FAX (402) 437-5712

Introduction

Producers who are working toward sustainability are often interested in new enterprises, products, or ways to market that can lead to greater profitability as well as greater environmental benefits. Maintaining a secure income is crucial for farmers and ranchers who anticipate changing their practices. Effective marketing can help ensure that the new enterprises and products will meet the needs of both farmers and their customers, providing the former with the income necessary to sustain the farm and the latter with goods and services they need and want. Sound marketing strategies can help protect against losses and enhance prospects for financial gain. Creative marketing strategies are just as important as production and conservation for a successful transition toward sustainability.

This technical note provides general guidance for developing marketing strategies and making marketing decisions in agricultural enterprises. It briefly describes how to develop a marketing strategy and explains a variety of techniques to increase net profitability of farm or ranch enterprises. It also provides numerous examples of marketing strategies that producers have used to increase farm profits.

What is Marketing?

Kotler (1988) defined marketing as “a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others.” Marketing is more than just finding clever ways to dispose of your products. It is the process by which one attempts to determine what customers want, produce it, advertise it, package it, distribute it, and sell it. Think of marketing as a doughnut with the customer in the center (fig. 1). The doughnut is comprised of four P's: **Product** (goods and services to be supplied), **Place** (how the goods and services will be distributed), **Price** (the cost of goods and services to both farmers and customers) and **Promotion** (how the goods and services will be communicated to the customer). Together they keep the producer focused on the customer. Marketing starts and ends with the customer. Understanding this concept is the first step toward making your farm business more sustainable.

Historically, farmers grew crops and livestock and brought them to market to sell. Marketing was essential to the farming operation. Today, farmers and ranchers are more specialized. Producers tend to

Figure 1 The four P's of marketing



focus on production, while other specialists handle processing, advertising, distribution, and sales. The result has been a shrinking portion of the food dollar going to the farmer and an increasing portion to others. Farmers in the United States on average receive less than \$0.20 of each dollar consumers spend on food. By refocusing some management efforts on the marketing of farm products, you can increase your share of the customer's costs and be better positioned to meet financial goals. You also assume the risk, inventory, and other costs associated with marketing.

The two basic marketing approaches are **transactional** marketing and **relationship** marketing. The transactional approach seeks to make the largest number of sales possible, while the relationship approach seeks to cultivate loyal, repeat customers. Sustainable agriculture is best suited to relationship marketing. Transactional marketers increase profits by increasing sales or decreasing costs. Relationship marketers increase profits by producing quality products or services that command a higher price or by cutting costs. To command a higher price for products, customer values must be considered. The customer might place value on freshness, processing, packaging, environmentally sound or health conscious farming techniques, or improved product quality. A higher price may also be obtained by selling directly to the end consumer. By increasing involvement in marketing, farmers and ranchers can potentially increase profits and maintain a more sustainable farm enterprise. Marketing your products should not be taken lightly, however. Risks, additional time, and other resource commitments will demand attention.

Developing a Marketing Strategy and Plan

Marketing begins by following a logical comprehensive plan. The plan should be straightforward and as simple as possible. A marketing plan should be an integral part of the overall farm plan. It should help focus energy and resources where they are needed. It should also help you adapt to consumer needs and make informed production decisions or changes. This note only touches on the development of marketing plans by describing some of their most common components. Additional resources on marketing plan development may be found in the section on Resource Materials and the list of references.

Goal setting

Overall goals for the farm or ranch should be clearly defined before developing a marketing plan. Whether lifestyle-oriented or financially-based, goals can help you make more meaningful decisions about which enterprises and markets are worth pursuing. To make decisions about marketing and production, you must also know your short- and long-term financial goals. Most people are in farming to make money, but how much, how soon, and at what personal and environmental costs varies from individual to individual. Sustainable farming operations often consider

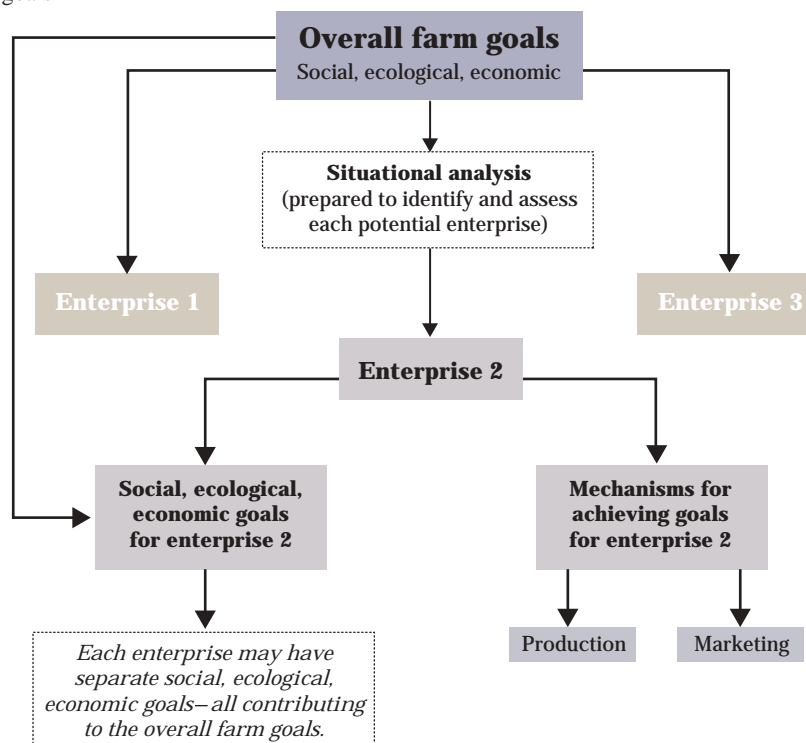
environmental protection as a major player along with economic considerations in the decisionmaking process. They focus on optimizing long-term income and environmental goals rather than maximizing short-term income. While producers may have an overall financial goal for the farm, the financial goals for individual enterprises on the farm may be different. Enterprise goals should support the overall farm goals, however figure 2 illustrates the relationships among farm goals, enterprise goals, and mechanisms for achieving them.

Marketing plan components

A brief overview of the marketing plan follows. A marketing approach generally starts from the outside and works inward. It begins with an analysis of the macroenvironment, the customer, and customer needs. This information can then be used to formulate strategies and actions and develop production plans to meet these needs. A typical marketing plan should include at least the following components:

- Market or situational analysis
- Customers and customer needs
- Strategies for achieving goals
- Budget
- Action plan
- Monitoring plan

Figure 2 Marketing goals



Component #1—Market or Situational Analysis.

Marketing decisions are often shaped by external forces. The situational analysis should evaluate the external forces that may influence what products and services you can produce. Changing demographics, changes in family unit, aging populations, available natural resources (water, soil, climate), and changes in the ethnic makeup of populations may affect farmer choices. Economic, political, and legal trends may also influence decisions. What is the impact of new technology? What about people's increasing fear of contamination of the food supply? This component of the plan analyzes strengths and weaknesses of the current farming operation and considers economic, social, and natural resource attributes and risks associated with each enterprise.

Component #2—Customers and Customer Needs.

The purpose of the needs assessment is to identify customers and their needs. This section of the marketing plan should answer the following questions:

- Who are my customers?
- What do they want?
- What can the competition provide them?
- What can I provide them that the competition cannot?

Customers may be identified by age, income level, gender, profession, or some other category such as environmental concerns or health consciousness. Each group of customers has values and special needs that you may or may not be able to meet. Identifying customers and their needs can help you focus on effectively reaching them. You must also identify the competition. Where are your customers shopping now? Are they getting what they want? Again, simplicity is the key. A comprehensive (i.e., expensive) needs analysis is generally not cost-effective when considering small-scale enterprises. A variety of texts on marketing research are available. For basic information on how to conduct market research, see *The Marketing Research Guide* by Stevens, Wrenn, Ruddick, and Sherwood (1997), for example. This text may be available through your local library. New or used copies are also available through many of the major booksellers.

Component #3—Strategies for Achieving Goals.

A marketing plan typically includes one or more broad strategies for achieving marketing goals. Strategies are the link between objectives and actions. They help determine the actions needed to accomplish your goals. Marketing strategy options might include:

- Developing new markets for existing products or services
- Improving products/services to reach new markets

- Increasing customer satisfaction by improving products or increasing product diversity
- Providing new products to new customers
- Reducing the resources expended on a particular product or service
- Terminating a particular enterprise

Different strategies may be needed for different products or services. Before deciding on strategic approaches, consider all aspects of the potential product that might affect its ultimate marketability. For example, will the product be organically produced or will it be marketed blemish-free? Will the product be distributed through brokers, wholesalers, retailers, farmers' markets, or sold directly on the farm? How will the product be priced? Will low prices be the aim or higher prices in return for some added value in the product? Finally, what will the market position be? For example, unique position might be secured through marketing the product as flavorful, exotic, nutritional, or environmentally sound.

Component #4—Action Plan. The action plan is the “to do” part of the marketing plan. It describes how the plan will be implemented, who will carry out the various stages of the plan, and when they should be started and completed. This section of the plan usually benefits from detailed information so that it will be easier to implement. An action plan should be developed for each customer group-product combination.

Component #5—Budget. A budget needs to be developed in conjunction with the action plan. How much potential income can be derived from this new way of marketing? How much of this can be made in the first year? The first 5 years? Write down each step of the thought process—how much it will cost and how much income may be gained. Keep records of actual expenses and revise the budget as accurate information becomes available.

Component #6—Monitoring Plan. Finally, a marketing plan should describe how progress toward meeting your goals would be monitored and measured. The marketing plan may need to be revised if goals are not being met. New strategies may be needed or existing strategies revisited. Be prepared to be flexible.

A worksheet to help entrepreneurs develop a marketing plan is available on the University of Nebraska Web site at <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/consumered/nf283.htm>. Marketing plan worksheets have been developed in many other states as well. Contact your local extension service for more information.

Techniques for Marketing

Your goals, resources, and products as well as local customer needs and habits usually dictate how marketing strategies are developed. Some of the many marketing options suitable for farm or ranch operations are summarized here. An infinite number of variations on these options exists—the only limitation is one's creativity. The four P's of marketing (**Product**, **Place**, **Price**, and **Promotion**) are highlighted in extensive case examples in this technical note.

Value added products

To a miller, the grain produced by farmers is the raw material from which valuable primary products (flour, cereals, wheat berries, bulgur, or bran) are made. To a bakery, primary products include bread, cookies, pastas, and tortillas. Very little of the retail price of flour, cereal, or cookies actually goes to the farmer. Yet, people are willing to pay high prices for these products and services. Therefore, when farmers go beyond the raw material and produce primary or secondary products, they add value to their commodities. This increased value can potentially increase farm income several-fold. However, adding value also has costs.

Value can be added to farm products in many ways. Packaging of products alone can significantly increase their value to customers, whether wholesale or retail. For example, a producer who assembles a mixture of beans and spices with an attached recipe for bean soup usually sells the “finished” product for many times what the raw beans or spices are worth as individual commodities. Jams, jellies, bread mixes, salad mixes, juices, and sun-dried fruit are other examples of value-added products. These additional opportunities and benefits usually come with additional regulatory control, however, especially at the State and local level. Permits, health inspections, and special facilities may be required if foods are processed on the farm.

For more information on value-added agriculture, see NRCS *Alternative Enterprises — Value-Added Agriculture* Information Sheet AE-4. It may be obtained by calling 1-888-LANDCARE or by visiting <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise>



Figure 3 Adding value to farm products, such as this maple syrup, can be as simple as packaging or involve more complex processing (photo courtesy of USDA)

Cooperative marketing

Donald Frederick (1997) defines a cooperative as “business owned and democratically controlled by the people who use its services and whose benefits are derived and distributed equitably on the basis of use.” Cooperatives differ from other forms of business in that the people who finance and control the cooperative are the same ones that use it. Cooperatives are popular in the agricultural community. Through cooperatives, farmers can pool their financial resources and conduct business more efficiently than they could as individuals.

Cooperatives exist in many forms. Supply cooperatives pool resources to purchase inputs for members. By purchasing these inputs in large quantities, members can reduce their costs through volume discounts. Cooperatives may provide services to members that other companies do not provide. They can also provide farmers with access to markets where they otherwise could not compete.

Most small, limited resource farms are not able to produce sufficient quantities of their product to realize gains from economies of scale. Greater production gives the farmer more power to negotiate better prices. By pooling the production of many farmers, a marketing cooperative has more leverage to negotiate the price received for its commodities. All members of the cooperative benefit from the higher price. The member who supplies 10,000

bushels of corn will receive the same price per bushel as the member who supplies 100,000 bushels, because together they have furnished more product and thus, achieved more control over price than either of them had alone. Marketing cooperatives can also help find buyers for the members' product, a major concern for producers of perishable crops.

Effective cooperation does not always involve formal organizations with bylaws and regulations. Cooperative activities among neighbors can occur at any level. Communal harvesting (fig. 4) and barn building (common among the Amish community) are examples of cooperative ventures. One cooperative marketing strategy used by farmers with small acreages is to share the maintenance and supply of a produce stand. While bigger is not always better, increasing the variety of produce available in a direct marketing outlet can encourage a larger customer base.

A cooperative approach works best when the producers live relatively close to each other geographically. Consult local extension personnel about cooperatives in your area or about forming one.



Figure 4 Members of the New North Florida Cooperative harvest collard greens and will wash, chop, package, and distribute the vegetables to local school districts (photo courtesy of USDA NRCS)

Case Examples

The **Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance** is a farmer cooperative established in 1993 to run a vegetable subscription service. Eight farms supply fruits and vegetables to 350 subscription members. The customers each pay a deposit at the beginning of the season, which allows (and obligates) them to purchase a bag of garden fresh vegetables each week for (at most) \$11.25. A portion of the deposit is used to run the cooperative.

By pooling their resources the farmers are able to supply more customers with a wider variety of produce, and more reliably than a single farm could typically accomplish. Farmer members agree at the beginning of the season what they will grow. Each week they inform the production manager of the amount of produce they can provide. The manager determines how much will be needed and coordinates delivery. Site coordinators distribute the food among the customer members. Most of the cooperative farmers sell through other outlets as well, but the subscription service gives them a reliable baseline income through the growing season.

Product: Locally grown fresh fruit and vegetables

Place: Customers come to central location

Price: Pre-set by cooperative

Promotion: Word-of-mouth, newsletter, flyers

Customers: Local urban consumers

The **Hampshire County Feeder Calf Producers Association** in northeastern West Virginia was established as a result of efforts by the local Cooperative Extension Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Farm Services Agency to strengthen community interaction. Nine farmers joined together to cooperatively market calves. The calves are sold by the cooperative at a special board sale. Bidders are connected to buyers over the telephone. The cattle are bought sight unseen. As a condition of sale, buyers must pick up the calves in 10 days. The calves are assembled and weighed at a designated location just before loading for transport to a feedlot.

Members of the cooperative strive to produce uniform, high quality cattle on each of their farms. They use the same management practices for feeding, vaccination, and weaning. All of the calves are weaned 45 days before sale. The cooperative strives to maintain uniform calving and genetics for their respective herds and emphasizes safe and stress-free handling of the animals. The animal handlers do not use electric cattle prods.

Cooperative members visit the feedlots that purchase their cattle annually. These visits help the producers evaluate the performance of their cattle and determine what they can do to improve next year's calves. This also shows the feedlot owners that the producers are willing to work to meet their needs.

The cooperative recently started a limited liability corporation called Headwaters Petite Beef that markets beef directly to the consumer.

Product: Uniform, stress-free feeder calves

Place: Local pick-up

Price: Commensurate with high quality, standard product
Promotion: Cooperative research, flyers, letters, phone calls, site visits
Customers: Local (regional) feedlots

The **New North Florida Cooperative** was started in 1995 to help minority farmers in the Florida Panhandle increase their incomes through innovative marketing. Unlike many cooperatives that require a substantial membership fee, the New North Florida Cooperative demands “sweat equity.” The cooperative members help each other with harvesting and processing, demonstrating the benefits of working together.

The cooperative strives first to tap the local market rather than the regional market. Not only are transportation costs lower, but also the resources remain in the community, helping the local economy. Another cooperative objective is to provide the farmer members with higher prices for their produce by taking the crop from the field directly to the consumers. Members help harvest, wash, process, package, and deliver their fruits and vegetables to local markets. Currently the largest customers serviced by the cooperative are the public school systems in Jackson and Gadsden counties in the Florida Panhandle. By purchasing through the cooperative, the school systems are able to support local farmers without having to enter into contracts with them individually.

Product: Processed fresh vegetables and fruit
Place: Local delivery
Price: Premium wholesale
Promotion: Cooperative function, direct contact, flyers, Internet
Customers: Local institutions (schools), local groceries

Direct marketing

Direct marketing is a rapidly expanding type of farm marketing that is based on selling a product directly to the consumer. It involves the elimination of one or possibly several middle steps in the marketing process. As a result, the percentage of retail price that the producer receives is significantly increased. Several ways of direct marketing are described in this section.

Farmers' markets

The term *farmers' market* is used to describe a market where farmers sell directly to the consumer, but this marketing system could also be called a *community market* because of the benefits it provides directly to the community (Marr and Gast, 1991).

Farmers' markets are among the oldest and most effective forms of direct marketing for small-volume producers. They allow farmers to increase their income, reduce transportation and distribution costs, and communicate directly with their customers. At the same time, consumers are provided direct access to fresh, locally grown produce and a chance to interact with the farmer (Ensor and Winn, 1993). Farmers' markets also benefit the community by bringing diverse customers and vendors together to strengthen personal ties. Sponsorship of farmers' markets may come from communities, state or local community service agencies, extension or education programs, and private citizens (Marr and Gast 1991).

Farmers' markets continue to increase in popularity (fig. 5). According to the 2000 National Farmers Market Directory, more than 2,850 farmers' markets are currently in the United States as compared with 1,755 in 1994 (USDA AMS, 2001). In a 1994 survey, the USDA determined that more than 20,000 farmers sold products at farmers' markets. More than 6,000 farmers used these markets as their sole outlet (Burnes and Johnson, 1996). Estimates place fruit and vegetable sales through farmers' markets at over \$1 billion annually. More than a million customers visit farmers' markets every week. These markets primarily provide access to customers for the small- and medium-sized farm operations (Burnes and Johnson, 1996).



Figure 5 Farmers' markets are increasing in popularity across the United States (photo courtesy of USDA)

Participating in farmers' markets benefits sustainable agriculture. Local farmers' markets provide an excellent forum for community participation and interaction with customers as well as other farmers. Farmers who are in contact with their customers have an outstanding opportunity to do market research. Consumers have the opportunity to get to know the farmers who produce their food and to make their desires and concerns known.

To locate a farmers' market in your area, see the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Web site: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/>, or check with you local extension service.

Case Examples

One of the largest farmers' markets in the country, the **Atlanta Farmers' Market** is owned and operated by the State of Georgia. The facility was built on public land in 1959. It is 922,000 square feet of permanent warehouse space and is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The market supports both wholesale and retail transactions. Farmers come from Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Florida to sell their produce here. Each year the Atlanta Farmers' Market generates \$4 million in revenue from rentals alone. Wholesalers rent warehouse space while farmers rent open-shed space.

Product: Regionally grown, fresh produce
Place: Customers come to the market
Price: Wholesale, some retail
Promotion: Internet, state publications
Customers: Wholesalers, farmers, local consumers

The **Kittitas County Farmers' Market** is a relatively small, privately run, nonprofit farmer's market in Ellensburg, Washington. It has been in operation since 1994 when a group of farmers got together to find an outlet for selling their produce directly to consumers. Originally situated in a school play yard, the market has moved to a bank parking lot near the center of town, much to everyone's satisfaction. The market is run by an elected board of directors. Vendors pay a nominal fee for space, the land is donated, and nearly all labor is volunteer. Most of the expenses associated with this farmers' market involve advertising.

Product: Local produce and homemade crafts
Place: Customers come to the market
Price: Competitive retail
Promotion: Flyers, media, word of mouth
Customers: Nearby residents and visitors

Community supported agriculture (CSA) is a growing and purchasing partnership between farmers and members of the local community. The farmer grows food for a group of shareholders (subscribers) who pledge to buy a portion of the farm's crop that season. The exact agreement between the farmer and the shareholder varies.

A share generally is targeted at providing a family with a weekly supply of vegetables and fruits and sometimes eggs, poultry, meat, and cheese for the duration of the growing season (fig. 6). The shares are paid to the farmer either before the growing season or in installments during the season. These payments provide the farmer with guaranteed income from the beginning of the season and a market for the farm's products. Consumers share both benefits and risks with the farmer. In good years they reap the bounty, but in bad years they share the loss. CSA members are typically families, but may also include restaurants, farmers' markets, or institutions. CSAs provide the consumer a fresh, high quality supply of produce, knowledge that they are supporting a local farm, and a way to connect with their food source. Many CSA enterprises operate as organic farms.

Currently, about 1,000 CSA operations are in the U.S. and Canada. Most are organized and run by individual farmers, but some are organized and run by consumers. Increasingly, CSAs may include more than one agricultural producer. All build stronger farmer and consumer relationships. For more information see NRCS information sheet AE-2, Alternative Enterprises—Community Supported Agriculture.

Figure 6 Typically, a weekly share of farm produce includes a variety of seasonal vegetables (photo courtesy of Common Good Farm CSA)



Case Examples

The **Hartford Food System** is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help low income communities get better access to high quality, lower cost food. In 1994, the Hartford Food System established the Holcomb Farm CSA project in Connecticut as a way to help connect lower income, inner city groups with their food source.

The farm currently supports the equivalent of 400 household shares, 60 percent of which are sold at full price to upper income families in the Greater Hartford area. The remaining 40 percent is sold at a discount to a variety of nonprofit organizations that distribute food to low-income families. These groups range from senior centers and housing projects to a group that distributes food to low-income families.

Of the direct farm operating costs, 90 percent are covered by share sales. The remaining costs associated with recruiting, marketing, education, and distribution are funded through individual contributions and grants.

In addition to a weekly box of food, the CSA provides cooking demonstrations, educational classes, field trips, and other outreach programs for the low-income and volunteer groups involved. Members may work on the farm, but are not required to do so.

Product: Healthy fruits and vegetables
Place: Local delivery and pickup
Price: Based on income (charity price support)
Promotion: Education, field trips, cooking classes
Customers: Low-income families; high income families; non-profit organizations

The **Covelo Organic Vegetables CSA** is one of two CSAs in Covelo, a small community of 1,300 residents near the north coast of California. The CSA serves 80 regular subscribers in the county and 20 subscribers in Berkeley, 200 miles to the south. In addition to regular customers, they supply 100 extra boxes per week for 15 weeks to the Round Valley Indian Health Clinic. The clinic hopes to help diabetics on the local Indian reservation improve their diet with fresh fruits and vegetables. The farm also sells vegetables and flowers at six farmers' markets.

The growing season in this area is 25 weeks. CSA subscribers pay \$12 per box picked up at the farm or \$15 per box delivered either to their door or to a nearby drop-off location. Each box contains up to eight types of fruit or vegetables and a weekly newsletter. A 10-week payment is requested in advance. Flowers are sold separately, but may be included with the vegetable delivery at the customer's request.

Product: Organic vegetables
Place: Home delivery, local pickup, farmers' market delivery
Price: Competitive
Promotion: Word-of-mouth, e-mail, newsletter
Customers: Local consumers

Internet marketing

The Internet has revolutionized how people communicate and shop. For some farmers it has also revolutionized the way they market their products. Many farmers have started their own Web sites to distribute information about their farm, transact sales, or both. Opening this "digital storefront" allows them to market to the entire world. The site is an advertisement that tells the story of a farm, giving consumers who are not familiar with a particular operation a virtual picture. It is an easy way to expand sales beyond conventional reach. Internet marketing is particularly effective for farmers in remote locations who cannot easily take advantage of more traditional urban markets. In 2001 web sites could be hosted by local Internet providers for \$6 to \$60 per month depending on the amount of Web traffic anticipated. Alternatively, some providers may host certain Web sites free in return for advertising privileges on a site. Setting up and operating a Web site does not require a degree in computer engineering, but professional graphics design consultants are widely available to help with design, installation, and maintenance of Web sites if needed.

Web site objectives should be considered before setting up the site. Determine if the Web site will be primarily used to advertise a product, provide information, or mediate actual sales. Web sites intended to sell seasonal products or keep customers informed about the farming operations, seasonal prices of goods, or when certain crops will be ripe must be frequently maintained and updated. If the objective is to save time, labor, money, or material and that objective is critical, a Web site may not be appropriate, and some farmers may find the maintenance aspect too time consuming.

A site must compete with hundreds of similar sites on the Internet. Strategies for obtaining and increasing Web site traffic follow:

1. Select a domain name that is easy to spell, meaningful, professional, and sends a marketing message.
2. Register the site with a search engine.
3. Provide links to other sites of interest to potential customers.
4. Personalize the Web site and make it interactive.
5. Show the Web site address everywhere—on business cards, labels, brochures, and newsletters.
6. Keep the Web site updated and fresh.

Even if the objective is not to sell items through a Web site, a site can still offer some advantages including e-mail contacts for questions, concerns, or even orders. However, if the objective is to sell products online, a site that is secure for credit card purchases is critical. A good Web site also provides contact information for customers who wish to phone or fax in orders (Sustainable Agricultural Network, 1997).

If you do not want to maintain a Web site, you can communicate with customers via e-mail rather than through a Web site. Commercial Internet directories, such as *smallfarm.com* and *localharvest.org*, can provide customers with access to farm Internet addresses. Producer associations and State Departments of Agriculture may also provide directories. Developing an e-mail mailing list of your own, sending out e-mail newsletters, and leaving your e-mail address in community plans are other ways of getting the word out about your farm.

Case Examples

Jeanie Dixon from Pasco, Washington, grows, paints, and sells ornamental gourds. Her Web site, <http://www.gourdsbyJeanie.com>, is full of information and links to information about gourds. Her purpose is not so much to sell gourds as to help connect gourd enthusiasts with each other and locate new sources of gourds for her craft. Her Web site includes numerous links to gourd associations, gourd growers, and information on growing and decorating gourds. “The demand for gourds far exceeds the supply,” she says. “They’re easy to grow and can be quite profitable. A farmer with a few acres of unused land who wants to try something new should consider growing gourds.” Jeanie hopes her Web site will help prospective gourd growers get started.

Product: Gourds and gourd products

Place: Internet mail-order, local consignment

Price: Competitive

Promotion: Internet, newspaper, crafts organizations

Customers: Gourd lovers and users, gourd growers

Dunton Family Farms in Oregon sells heirloom vegetable, herb, and wildflower seeds through the Victory Seed Company at their Web site, <http://www.victoryseeds.com>. At first it was difficult to make sales over the Internet because they could not accept credit cards. Once they invested in a secure Web site and credit card processing, their business doubled. Mike Dunton says the Internet has been far more cost-effective for them than traditional advertising, allowing them to reach many more customers for a much lower cost. However, he notes that it is only cost-effective because the Web site is managed with in-house resources. If management of the Web site were contracted out, the costs would quickly mount.

Product: Heirloom seeds

Place: Mail order (national distribution)

Price: Premium

Promotion: Internet Web site, catalogs, word-of-mouth

Customers: Organic growers, individual gardeners, specialized nurseries

Joan Shaw and her husband grow “low spray” heirloom apples on 20 acres in northern Utah. Joan manages a Web site, <http://www.dragongoose.com>, in which she publishes essays on gardening (especially roses) and growing apples. To pay for the Web site, she has become an associate advertiser for amazon.com. She receives a small percentage of any book sales that occur through a link from her Web site to amazon.com. The income is not great, but it paid for the Web site three times over last year. “There are other companies who offer similar options,” she says.

Product: Web site

Place: Internet links

Price: Percentage of book sales

Promotion: Promotes books through Web site

Customer: amazon.com

On-farm sales

The on-farm store or roadside stand (fig. 7) is a common and traditional means of marketing farm products. Like other means of direct marketing, on-farm stores provide commodities from the producer directly to the consumer, eliminating middle costs.

The costs for establishing an on-farm store or roadside stand can range from virtually nothing for a simple stand to very expensive for an elaborate store. However, the success of on-farm sales depends on location, consumer preferences, and labor. Costs can mount quickly if someone must be on duty at all times. Profits will suffer if the location is too far from a good customer base. Regulations, laws, and rules vary by location, so it is important to contact local and county authorities before establishing a roadside or on-farm stand. In general, regulations tend to be more complex when produce leaves the farm than when it is sold on the farm (Tronstad, 1995).



Figure 7 Roadside stand or on-farm stand (photo courtesy of Gizdich Ranch)

If on-farm sales are a part of your marketing strategy, start by selling those items that you are good at producing, then offer a few higher quality items. Ask customers what other products they would be interested in purchasing, and build the product selection based on their suggestions.

One strategy that has been successful for some on-farm marketers is enterprise blending. A farm that sells both fruit and crafts, for example, may sell more of each than if only one of these items is available. This purchasing phenomenon happens because each enterprise attracts a different type of buyer, but the buyer often discovers an interest in the other enterprise after arriving at the farm. One farmer who

sells both sweet corn and peaches says that the people who come to the farm for the sweet corn often leave with a box of peaches, too.

Atmosphere is especially important to on-farm sales. Keeping a store or stand neat and attractive will go a long way toward gaining sales. Some farmers emphasize the rural nature of the market by displaying old equipment or implements. Ultimately, the personal touch is important in creating this atmosphere. Simple things like a friendly greeting, providing useful information, and visiting with customers encourages repeat business (Gibson, 1994). Maintaining regular hours and a variety of products also attracts customers.

Case Example

Dan Shepherd and his wife raise buffalo, pecans, sweet corn, and eastern gammagrass on their farm in central Missouri. They have been selling buffalo meat and pecans on-farm since 1990. Over time, the enterprise has developed into a full-fledged on-farm store. In 1991, they constructed a building that houses offices and a pecan processing area as well as the store itself. Today, in addition to their own farm produce, they sell products from elsewhere in Missouri, including peaches, jams, jellies, barbecue sauce, cards, and cookbooks. The store is open every day until 6:00 p.m. During peak seasons, such as Christmas and the summer months when sweet corn and peaches are available, they may have 400 to 500 sales per day. During the slow seasons (September and January) they may have only 10 visitors per day. Since there is always someone at the farmstead, the store remains open even when visitors are few.

Dan says that on-farm sales are not for everyone. You have to like talking with people. "People come to the store to buy something. It's my job to make sure they walk out with something. It takes a certain personality to be a sales person," he says. He also notes farms that host visitors need to be kept neat and clean to attract customers and encourage them to buy. "Appearance makes a big difference," he says.

Product: Buffalo meat, sweet corn, regional produce, and gifts

Place: On-farm pickup

Price: Retail

Promotion: Local media

Customers: Urban visitors

Pick-Your-Own

Pick-your-own or “U-pick” operations offer several advantages. First, they reduce labor costs involved with harvesting, washing, and grading. Customers pay lower prices and experience being out in the field, harvesting the crop, and enjoying the country atmosphere. Crops that are easy to recognize as ripe, such as blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, and strawberries (fig. 8) are popular U-pick crops (Tronstad, 1995). These enterprises often work well when combined with farm tours.



Figure 8 U-pick operations give customers fresh produce and the experience of harvesting a crop and enjoying the country atmosphere (photo courtesy of Gizdich Ranch)

Before deciding on a U-pick operation, carefully consider all that is involved with opening the farm to the public. Some of the typical requirements are: parking spaces, liability insurance, and a willingness to deal with the public (Sustainable Agricultural Network, 1997). Another risk associated with these enterprises is spoilage, particularly, but not exclusively, if bad weather keeps customers away during critical times.

Agri-entertainment

Agri-entertainment is another dimension that can be added to pick-your-own or other on-farm marketing strategies. This is simply another means of attracting additional customers to the farm. Agri-entertainment can involve a broad spectrum of activities including festivals, special events, hayrides, contests, mazes, cooking classes, agri-educational tours, or recreational hunting, fishing, or hiking (fig. 9). Agri-entertainment may attract a different set of customers than would otherwise visit the farm. If carefully planned and advertised, it may be an effective means of increasing your customer base and profits.



Figure 9 Agri-entertainment brings the farm experience to tourists.

Agri-entertainment can be time consuming and may involve liability and other legal issues, but it may also be very rewarding. Some farmers find entertainment production as enjoyable as food and fiber production. Gibson (1994) recommends that anyone contemplating developing rural attractions on their farm for agri-entertainment should start simply; for example, by providing a shaded picnic area for visitors to the farm. Use the rural setting as an advantage.

Case Example

Ioka Family Farms in the Hancock Valley, Massachusetts, was a dairy farm for over 60 years before the family decided to convert to a visitor-oriented farm. Located near the Berkshires, a year-round tourist center, the farm is ideally situated for this purpose.

The farm provides entertainment during all four seasons. On weekends mid-February through mid-April, visitors can visit the 2,400-tap Sugar Bush to view the process of boiling maple syrup and enjoy pancake meals with maple syrup in the Calf-A. Summer activities include pick-your-own strawberries, a petting zoo, a hay tunnel and hay pile, giant sandboxes, Molly Milk Me (the mechanical cow), pedal tractors, a book and game library, an outdoor farm-theme playground, hay rides, and a picnic area. Fall activities include hayrides on a giant pumpkin or haunted house, pumpkin picking, spooky hay tunnel, corn maze, and farm stand. In the winter, Christmas trees may be selected in the field or from a pre-cut selection at the farm stand. Hayrides are also offered, and the second week in December, Santa visits the farm for “Breakfast with Santa” at the Calf-A.

Most of the visitor-oriented seasons are doing well except the summer program. The family had hoped to entice 10,000 visitors to the farm during the summer. To date they are several thousand visitors short of their goal. Customers are almost always pleased once they arrive, but convincing them to come to the farm and paying an admission fee has been a challenge, especially for people that live locally.

The family is in the process of evaluating the reasons for low attendance. Possibilities include weekend weather conditions, farm located too far from a large urban area, the entertainment may focus too narrowly on young children ages 2-10, customers are not yet comfortable with the idea of paying to visit a farm, and there are too many farms doing the same thing, saturating the market.

Product: Farm entertainment, maple syrup, Christmas trees; berries, pumpkins, value-added products
Place: On-farm visits and pickup
Price: Under evaluation
Promotion: Tourist bureau, Internet
Customers: Local families with young children

Other forms of direct marketing

Other direct marketing strategies include mail order marketing, delivery service, and rent-a-row or tree. Mail order businesses allow the farmer to charge premium prices for a product without having to face the public directly. This may be important to those who prefer privacy. Products sold must be storable, ship well, and be relatively lightweight. Seed sales often make effective mail order businesses. In mail order businesses, organization, promptness, and detailed record keeping are critical to success. Another critical component of mail order marketing is the mailing list. Developing an effective mailing list can take several years. Lists developed by others generally are not effective, as the customers you want to target need to be customers interested in your product(s).

Case Example

Dunton Family Farms in Oregon has been transitioning from local sales of seasonal produce, nuts, hay, beef, and eggs to mail order and Web-based sales of heirloom seeds from their company, the Victory Seed Company. Customers may order over the Internet or through a standard seed catalog. Mike Dunton says both are needed. The Internet reaches a wider audience, and Internet customers are

more likely to be spontaneous buyers; but many customers want a catalog in hand before they order. A printed catalog also gives a sense of legitimacy to the operation. Anyone can create a Web site, but farmers who invest in printed sales materials give the appearance of being serious about selling their products.

Product: Heirloom seeds
Place: Mail order (catalog and internet)
Price: Premium
Promotion: Internet Web site, catalogs, word of mouth
Customers: Organic growers, individual gardeners, specialized nurseries

Farmers or groups of farmers who run delivery services can command high prices for their products. However, locating and retaining customers for delivery services can be extremely time-consuming, and transportation costs can rapidly add up. Another issue is reliability. Customers will remain loyal only if they receive what they are promised when it is promised. Still, if time and resources are available to implement this strategy, the personal and financial rewards can be great.

Case Example

Seabreeze Organic Farm in San Diego, California, has been operating a produce delivery service for local customers for about 5 years. Produce was originally sold through farmers' markets, but as the number of farmers' markets increased, the customer base became diluted. Stephenie Caughlin, general manager, decided to bring the market to the customer instead of asking the customer to come to the market. Seabreeze customers prepay for weekly boxes of produce a month in advance. Food is delivered to their door along with a newsletter and recipes. Currently, 250 homes receive weekly boxes at a price of \$20 to 40 each. Seabreeze has a Web site, but their most effective advertising has been through word-of-mouth and fliers left on doorknobs throughout the delivery area. A local marketing firm performs this latter task for the farm.

Product: Organic vegetables and health products
Place: Home delivery in local neighborhoods
Price: Based on service
Promotion: Flyers left on doors (hired advertising)
Customers: Local urban consumers interested in healthy foods and convenience

Another direct marketing strategy that may work on some farms located near urban centers is the “rent a row, tree, or animal” strategy. Here the customer pays to rent a plot of land, a tree, or an animal, such as a milk cow, at the beginning of the growing season. The farmer provides labor and inputs needed to grow the crop or produce the animal product. Then the customer receives and sometimes harvests the crop or animal product at the end of the year. This marketing strategy could be considered a variation on the U-pick strategy, but for the farmer it eliminates much of the risk involved with U-pick, as payment is up-front. One of the difficulties with this strategy is the need to keep track of the management practices implemented on each item rented. Another problem may be keeping track of the renters, some of whom may wish to visit their rental regularly. Scheduling public access to the farm must be included in the up-front planning.

Case Examples

Steve and Diana Harris of **Shiloh Fruits** in Greenleaf, Idaho, grow a variety of fruit trees and market both fruit and cider through a number of channels. Some of these include an on-farm store, a farmers’ market, and a rent-a-tree program. An accessible portion of their orchard has been set aside for individual tree rental. Bartlett pear and five varieties of apple trees are available for annual rent. Prices vary according to the size of the tree. Most rental customers have been individual families.

Steve notes that, while the rent-a-tree program has not yet taken off, the concept is gradually becoming more accepted. Those customers who do rent trees often return to rent again. They are also likely to buy other fruits, such as peaches, apricots, or cherries, from the farm store.

Product: Apples, pears

Place: On-farm pickup, wholesale

Price: Retail, wholesale

Promotion: Flyers, letters, business cards, Web site

Customers: Local fruit-lovers, wholesalers

Rent Mother Nature is the trademark name for Shared Harvest, a company operating out of the Boston area since 1979. Customers can rent a maple tree, beehive, cow (for cheese), sheep (for wool), apple tree, and many other items. Upon purchase, customers receive a personalized lease document and an announcement folder describing the program. Progress reports are mailed to lease holders throughout the growing season. An action photo of the tree, hive, sheep, or other leased item is also provided. The harvested product is delivered at the end of the season.

The company was started in an effort to help small farmers market their products and bring urban dwellers closer to the source of their food. It grew from the idea that, while most farm products are widely available, the farm experience is not.

Product: Trees, beehives, animals (for rent)

Place: Mail order

Price: Premium

Promotion: Web site, brochures, catalog

Customers: Urban dwellers

3D Wines, a company in England, offers the public a chance to rent a row of grapevines from one of several top vineyards in France. Renting a row of grapevines gives customers the opportunity to purchase up to 4 cases of wine from their chosen vineyard at cost.

Any marketing strategy has advantages and disadvantages. Whether any of these direct marketing strategies is suitable for a particular situation depends on the size of the farm, the variety of crops grown, available labor, and farmer goals and personality. Many farmers use more than one marketing strategy simultaneously, and others use different strategies at different times.

Niche markets

Niche markets target a specific customer base. While mass marketers aim to supply the largest possible number of customers with a product that everyone can use, niche marketers seek to supply a smaller number of customers with exactly the product they want. Consumer tastes and preferences are not uniform. The mass marketing approach overlooks these subtle differences in demand in order to gain the greatest number of customers. Of the millions of people that make up the mass market, many are not satisfied with what the market supplies. These purchasers provide an opportunity for the niche marketer (fig. 10). Discriminating consumers are willing to pay a premium for high quality products, hard to find or uncommon products, or products produced in an environmentally friendly way.

Niche markets can take several forms. Specialized ethnic foods are unique products that are not commonly found in mass-market grocery stores. Popular ethnic market items include herbs, seasonings, and cheeses—often hand-produced. Health conscious consumers also comprise a significant niche market opportunity for the producer. Products increasingly marketed to this group include such items as organic produce, organic or natural grass-fed beef, free-range poultry, and organic milk.

The most important step in niche marketing is research. Find out what people in the local area want. Next, determine if the number of customers is sufficient to make a particular product profitable. If so, then plot a strategy on how to produce the product(s) to meet their needs.



Figure 10 Niche markets provide products sought-after by a select group of customers willing to pay more for what they want. Japanese eggplant is highly prized in certain markets. (photo courtesy of USDA)

Case Example

Headwaters Petite Beef is a limited liability corporation started by the Hampshire County Cooperative in West Virginia to capture a niche market for environmentally and health conscious individuals who want tender, low fat, hormone- and antibiotic-free beef. Ten-month-old calves that weigh approximately 750 pounds are sold directly to supporters of the Cacapon Institute, a nonprofit, environmental organization dedicated to protecting Appalachian watersheds. These consumers want to feel that they are doing their part to help the local environment. Petit Beef allows them to contribute to the health of the Potomac River by supporting agriculture that uses environmentally sound management practices. They are willing to pay a premium price for a product they want produced in the manner they want.

Product: Hormone- and antibiotic-free, environmentally friendly beef

Place: Local pickup

Price: Premium retail

Promotion: Flyers, letters directed at target customers

Customers: Cacapon Institute (local environmental group)

Public Relations and Marketing

Public relations and advertising are two aspects of **promotion** (the fourth **P** described in the section on marketing). No matter how good the product or service is or how needed it is, it will not sell if customers do not know about it. Public relations makes people aware of you and your farm operation. Advertising makes people aware of and sells your product or service. Both are powerful marketing tools (Thayer, 1996).

Public relations uses local media to publish or broadcast newsworthy information about you or your farm. It helps you gain credibility and visibility in your market at little or no personal cost. Advertising involves purchase of media time or space to draw favorable attention to the product or service you are selling. It can be effective, but also expensive and should be planned carefully to efficiently reach your target audience with a message that is memorable and attracts favorable attention to your product or service. Many references on public relations and advertising should be available through your local library. Two recently published books are *Feeding the Media Beast: An Easy Recipe for Great Publicity* by Mark Mathis and *Advertising: Ideas and Techniques from the World's Best Campaigns* by Mario Pricken.

For More Information

Some resources for farmers who want to learn more about innovative marketing for sustainable agriculture are listed in this section. An extensive list of resources is available in *Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism: Farming for Profit and Sustainability Toolkit* published by the USDA NRCS Resource Economics and Social Sciences Division and Resource Conservation and Community Development Division. The toolkit is on the Web page <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise>, or it may be obtained by calling (202) 720-0132.

Direct marketing associations

Direct marketing associations provide many benefits to members including member and consumer directories, conferences, workshops, tours, newsletters, certification, insurance, and government relations. One of their main functions is to provide networking opportunities and marketing information to members.

Currently, 41 farmers' market and direct farm marketing associations are active in the United States (USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service, 2001). One of the largest of these, the North American Farm Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA), was established to promote and foster "the growth of farm direct marketing by offering opportunities for education, networking, and fellowship to its members." For more information about NAFDMA, visit their Web site, <http://www.nafdma.com/>. NAFDMA encourages formation of regional and local associations. Farmers considering direct marketing strategies may want to become involved with one or more direct marketing associations.

Publications

Farming Alternatives: A Guide to Evaluating the Feasibility of New Farm-Based Enterprises. Small Farms Series, Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Services, Cornell University, 152 Riley-Robb Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853, telephone (607) 255-7654. This publication is written for families and individuals interested in developing a new farm-based enterprise and is especially helpful for those considering nontraditional enterprises. It is written as a workbook and has worksheets to evaluate family goals, alternative enterprises, marketing, production, profitability, financial feasibility, and decisionmaking. It also has an excellent list of resources.

Tilling the Soil Of Opportunity: Nx Level™ Guide for Agricultural Entrepreneurs. University of Nebraska, US WEST Foundation and SARE. Call 1-800-873-9378 or 1-800-328-2851 to find out where the next course will be held in your area. This training course was developed by more than 15 business writers, producers, and consultants involved in successful direct marketing agricultural businesses. It covers assessing your resources, business planning and research, marketing, business management, legal considerations, budgets, and financial management. During the course, each participant sets goals and objectives and prepares their own business plan. The goal is "Helping Producers Reach the Next Level of Success...."

Ca\$hing in on Business Opportunities: A Guide to Building a Home-Based and Micro Business Program. Southern Rural Development Center, (601) 325-3207. This curriculum is designed for educators to use in working with home-based and micro businesses. The curriculum is comprehensive and covers a wide array of topics of interest to current or potential business owners. It can be used by educators or entrepreneurs. Overhead material and diskettes accompany the manual. It comes in two 4-inch binders.

Ideas for Alternative Agricultural Enterprises.

This 7-page fact sheet lists several alternative enterprise ideas and how they can be developed and has three pages on developing a business plan. Contact the Missouri Alternatives Center (573) 882-1905 or <http://www.agebb.missouri.edu/mac/> for a copy.

“Agritainment”—Farm & Ranch Recreation

Resource Directory. North Dakota Extension Service. This notebook has information on creativity and quality, marketing strategies; feasibility cash flow; insurance; starting a business; North Dakota laws, regulations, and telephone numbers; home business ideas; grants; and resources. Contact Kathleen Tweeten, (701) 328-5134 or e-mail ktweeten@ndsuext.nodak.edu. Cost \$25.00.

Reap New Profits: Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers. This PowerPoint presentation for educators on CD-ROM may be obtained through the Sustainable Agriculture Network Web site, <http://www.sare.org/htdocs/pubs/>.

The Feasibility of Agricultural Alternatives (Updated June 1996). Forrest Stegelin, Extension Agribusiness Economist, University of Kentucky, (606) 257-5762. This is an outline of what needs to be considered in developing an alternative enterprise. Twelve steps are presented in this detailed 11-page outline. Successes or failures in the farm business depend largely upon the soundness of managerial decisions.

Web sites

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise/> provides access to a 950-page resource manual on alternative enterprises and agritourism, information sheets, success stories, and resource people listed by state, region, and national.

<http://www.attra.org/>, Appropriate Technology Transfer For Rural Areas. This center has information on production and marketing of many products. The information is also available by calling 1-800-346-9140.

<http://www.usda.gov/oce/smallfarm/>, Small Farms @USDA: Creating Opportunities, Preserving Choices. This USDA Web site has council information, a database, and lists of events and people.

<http://www.sare.org>, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education. This site has information and links to information on a variety of topics related to sustainable agriculture, including the marketing aspects of sustainable agriculture.

<http://www.ssi.nrcs.usda.gov/>, Natural Resources Conservation Service Social Sciences Institute. This site has a wealth of resources on many aspects of marketing and marketing research.

<http://www.agebb.missouri.edu/mac>, Missouri Alternatives Center. This University of Missouri Web site has alternative agriculture and agritourism publications, links, and mailing addresses. The information is also available by calling (314) 882-1905.

<http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/>, University of Missouri Outreach and Extension. This Web site is one example of what is available at Land Grant Universities. Most Land Grant Universities devote some resources to alternative enterprise assistance/development and agritourism. Several states have special centers, institutes, or economic development devoted to work in these areas.

More case studies

The New American Farmer: Profiles of Agricultural Innovation was published by SARE. This publication documents a growing reality across the United States. It is stories about farmers raising and marketing crops and livestock differently. Case studies for 48 farm/ranch families are presented by the four SARE regions. For a free CD or copy, call (301) 504-6422, e-mail san@nal.usda.gov, or print it off the Web <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic>.

Renewing the Countryside: Minnesota was published by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Great Plains Institute for Sustainable Development, and the Northeast Minnesota Sustainable Development Partnership, University of Minnesota. It has 39 case studies that address sustainable farming, marketing, product innovations, harvesting nature, conservation, tourism and culture, and community. To obtain a copy, call (612) 870-3400, e-mail rtc@iatp, or go to <http://www.mncountryside.org>.

For several farmer/rancher success stories of alternative enterprises, agritourism, and conservation, go to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise/>.

References

Adam, Katherine. 2002. Community supported agriculture. ATTRA, Fayetteville, AR, 2 pp, <http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/csa.html>.

Corum, Vance, Marcie Rosenzweig, and Eric Gibson. 2001. The new farmer's market. New World Publ., Auburn, CA, 257 pp.

Ensor, S.A., and H. Winn. 1998. Farmers' markets. No. 4.007 Farm and Ranch Ser., Colorado State Univ. Coop. Ext., 2 pp, www.ext.colostate.edu/

Frederick, Donald. 1997. Co-ops 101, an introduction to cooperatives. USDA Rural Bus. Coop. Serv. Coop. Info. Rep. 55, 51 pp, <http://www.ncfc.org/resources/business/start/coops101.htm>.

Gibson, Eric. 1994. Sell what you sow! The Grower's Guide to Successful Produce Marketing. New World Publ., Carmichael, CA, 302 pp.

Greer, L. 1998. Marketing channels: pick-your-own and agri-entertainment. ATTRA, Fayetteville, AR, 7 pp, <http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/pickyour.html>.

Marr, Charles, and Karen Gast. 1991. A guide to starting, operating and selling in farmers' markets. MF-1019 Rev. Kansas State Univ. Coop. Ext. Serv., 7 pp.

Mathis, M.E. 2002. Feeding the media beast: an easy recipe for great publicity. Purdue Univ. Press, 292 pp.

Pricken, Mario. 2002. Creative advertising: ideas and techniques from the world's best campaigns. Thames and Hudson, 264 pp.

Stevens, R.E., B. Wrenn, M.E. Ruddick, and P.K. Sherwood. 1983. The marketing research guide. Haworth Marketing Resources, Haworth Press, 488 pp.

Sustainable Agriculture Network. 1997. Marketing strategies for farmers and ranchers. USDA, 20 pp, <http://www.sare.org/san/htdocs/pubs/>

Tronstad, Russell. 1995. Direct farm marketing options. Coop. Ext. Serv., Univ. AZ, Tucson, 7 pp.

United States Department of Agriculture. 1988. Marketing U.S. Agriculture. 1988 Yearbook of Agriculture. U.S. Gov. Printing Of., Washington, DC, 327 pp.

United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service. 2001. Directory of farmers markets and direct marketing associations, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/DIRECTMARKETING/>.

United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service. 2001. Farmers market facts! 2 pp, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/facts.htm>.

United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. 1979. Soil survey of Santa Cruz, California.

Case Studies

The case studies that follow represent farmers who have adopted different marketing strategies for different reasons.

Case Study 2-1: Roy Milleson, Headwaters Petite Beef



Location

Hampshire County, West Virginia

Farm size

955 acres

Original strategy

Products: Traditional beef production

Marketing: Traditional outlets

New strategy

Products: Rotationally grazed, environmentally friendly, hormone-free beef, "Petit beef"

Marketing: Cooperative marketing through traditional outlets, cooperative marketing direct to consumer

Marketing issues

Transition to rotational grazing, cooperative participation, direct marketing, social issues

For more information

Steve Ritz, District Conservationist
500 E. Main St.
Romney, WV 26757

Site Description

Roy Milleson operates the 955-acre farm that has been in his family for three generations. The farm lies along the South Branch of the Potomac River near Romney, West Virginia. The topography on his farm is typical of farms along the South Branch. The narrow river bottoms grade into gentle hills and then into steep terrain. Much of the Milleson farm is woodland.

Objectives

Roy's main objective for the farm is efficiency. He wants to increase return and decrease workload and expenses. Roy plans to meet his objective by focusing on low-cost production and cost-efficient management.

Transition to Rotational Grazing

Roy Milleson took over operations of the Milleson farm from his father in 1990. He started out with beef and corn enterprises typical of farms in the area. An injury to his leg in 1996 and loss of the corn crop by two major floods forced Roy to reevaluate his operation. He analyzed the time and money that was involved with the corn and concluded that it was unprofitable. His focus then shifted to developing the pasture grazing system that his father had experimented with years ago.

Roy decided to move to a rotational grazing system for managing his cattle. Rotational grazing involves moving animals through a series of fields or paddocks on a regular basis. This system allows more animals to be grazed on the same acreage. By having all animals in the same paddock, the forage is consumed evenly over the entire paddock area. This means more consumption and more even utilization of forage. Once cattle have thoroughly grazed one paddock, they are moved to a new paddock with fresh grass. The previous paddock is allowed to "rest" until cattle come back to it in the rotation. By this time, the grass has regrown and is ready to graze. By varying the number and size of paddocks, farmers are better able to cope with seasonal differences in grass growth and prevent overgrazing. Key factors to successful rotational grazing are adequate fences and a good supply of water to all paddocks.

The transition sequence on the Milleson farm is still in process. Roy prioritized the sequence to meet the goal of becoming more efficient. First, he needed to improve his handling facilities. He noted, "\$2,000 in facilities can save you \$10,000 in medical bills." Next, he began fencing to make best use of the available water sources on the farm. Water in the drought-prone eastern panhandle of West Virginia is a limiting

factor on many farms. Roy's focus has been diversification of water systems as insurance against drought. He believes that developing a variety of springs and ponds and using a high-pressure system of pipes will give him greater ability to cope with drought. With financial assistance provided by a USDA-sponsored drought relief effort, he has installed five watering troughs and 2,300 feet of water line.

Currently, the Milleson farm is a 90-cow/calf operation. They raise predominately Angus cattle to provide the market with the desired medium-frame calf. This year they will retain 20 heifers as replacement stock.

Cooperative Participation and Direct Marketing

Roy Milleson markets his beef through the Hampshire County Feeder Calf Producers Association, a home-grown farmer cooperative that developed out of an attempt to strengthen community interaction. Before entering the cooperative, the Milleson's sold their calves primarily through the local stockyards, although some direct sales were made from time to time. Now they strive to meet the cooperative's strict standards of size and quality.

One goal of the cooperative is to produce uniform cattle from different farms. All of the cooperative members use the same management practices with regards to feeding, vaccination, and weaning. All of the calves are weaned 45 days prior to sale. The cooperative also strives to maintain uniform calving and genetics for their respective herds. The group emphasizes safe, stress-free handling of the animals.

A second goal of the cooperative is to explore the opportunities for direct marketing the beef produced by cooperative members through a limited liability corporation called Headwaters Petite Beef. The development of a direct sales component along with the calf pool represents a two-phased approach to marketing. This will help the cooperative diversify and spread its risk.



Petite Beef is used to describe a 750-pound animal at 10 months of age. Because calves are young, the beef is naturally lean and tender. The calves are raised on grass, then marketed as naturally lean (less than 8 percent fat) and environmentally friendly. They are hormone and antibiotic free. Removing the calves early also reduces competition with the cows for late season pasture. This extends grazing time for the herd and reduces the cost of winter feed. Production costs are further cut by not having to purchase and administer expensive animal medications. Milleson's goal is to be able to gradually increase the number of calves he can market directly to the consumer as petite beef.

Social Issues

Direct marketing helps consumers understand where their food comes from, puts a face on the farmer, and helps bring the community closer together. This marketing strategy puts the environmental community and the farmers working together in a mutually beneficial partnership to improve the environment, help farmers improve their livelihood, and provide consumers with a superior agricultural product. Everyone in the Hampshire County Feeder Calf Producers Association is like-minded about environmental stewardship, and all want to see the Potomac Valley and their way of life protected for the future. Milleson is glad to be part of the process.

Conclusion

The marketing cooperative has provided many benefits to Roy Milleson. Through the cooperative Milleson has been able to improve both the quality of the cattle and the management thought processes involved in producing the cattle. "The positives went well beyond the price," says Milleson. Through the cooperative the local farmers have learned to work together. Roy notes, "Everybody has strong points in different areas that everybody else has been able to use." This cooperative effort, sharing of talents, and desire to see everyone who is involved benefit has enabled the members of cooperative to increase their profits and improve sustainability.

Local residents are concerned with protecting the rural landscape and the small family farm. Consumers are concerned with the environmental impacts of agriculture and with healthy food. The Headwaters Petite Beef project connects the concerns of the local consumers with local farmers who want to produce an environmentally friendly product in a sustainable manner. It helps to preserve the rural landscape and the family farm by making farms more profitable. It also meets the demands of the consumers to have healthy, and environmentally friendly products.

Case Study 2-2: Der Thao and Nikk Cha



Location

Dakota County, Minnesota

Farm size

65 acres (54 farmable)

Original strategy

Products: Cut flowers, vegetables

Marketing: Multiple farmers' markets

New strategy

Products: Cut flowers (medium bouquet), perennial flowers, woody floral products, fruits, berries

Marketing: Niche marketing at multiple farmers' markets

Marketing issues

Objectives, farmers' markets, customer relations, strategies

For more information

Dakota and Ramsey County Field Office
4100 220th St, W.
Farmington, MN 55024
(651) 463-8665

Site Description

Der Thao and Nikk Cha recently purchased a 65-acre farm in Dakota County, Minnesota, about 35 minutes south of St. Paul. Together with Der's parents, they grow a variety of vegetables and cut flowers, and they have plans to expand their enterprises to include fruit trees, berries, and perennial plants for floral arrangements.

The climate in Dakota County is characterized by cold winters and summers that are generally hot with occasional cool periods. Winter precipitation frequently occurs as snow. Summer precipitation occurs as sporadic showers and thunderstorms that are occasionally severe. The average low temperature in the winter is 7 degrees Fahrenheit, while the average summer high is 81 degrees Fahrenheit. About 70 percent of the annual precipitation (21 inches) falls during the growing season (April through September).

The dominant soils on the farm are loams belonging to the Lester, Le Sueur, and Cylinder series. Slopes range from 1 to 6 percent, though most of the land is less than 3 percent slope. Although some of the soils are somewhat poorly drained, most are moderately well drained to well drained, making them highly productive. Most have moderately slow permeability, moderate runoff, and a high available water holding capacity. Some have a seasonal high water table and are somewhat erosive. The soils are highly suited to crop production.

Der and Nikk feel lucky that they were able to purchase their farm, and they want to express thanks to Greg Bengold, Farm Services Agency loan officer, and Kham Yang, outreach coordinator for the Minnesota Food Project, for helping them achieve their dream of owning a farm.

Objectives

Both Der and Nikk love farming. "With farming," says Nikk, "the day is never so long that you have to look at your watch." It is also an occupation in which the entire family can participate and a way to keep the family together. Farming is in their blood. Both Nikk's and Der's parents farmed in Laos and Cambodia before coming to the United States. The family's objectives include maintaining and improving the farm, paying off the loan, and supporting the family through farming. They want to meet their economic objectives by growing quality flowers, vegetables, and perennial crops to meet the needs of their customers.



Markets

Der and Nikk market their produce at several farmers' markets in the Twin Cities area. They sell produce on the weekends at the St. Paul farmers' market. Minneapolis has a farmers' market that is larger than the St. Paul market, but farmers at the Minneapolis farmers' market must compete for customers with wholesalers. At the St. Paul farmers' market, vendors are required to produce what they sell, so wholesalers are not allowed. During the week, Der, Nikk, and Der's parents sell produce at several smaller farmers' markets in and around St. Paul. After the markets close, the family returns to the farm to harvest the next day's produce.

Customers

The family has loyal customers at all their markets. Over time they have developed relationships with their customers. Der says they generally fall into two categories. The customers who come early are looking for quality. Those who come late are looking for bargains. The family can generally accommodate both types by lowering their price at the end of the day. This way they can sell all their produce each day, so produce is always fresh. The early customers can get the highest quality possible, and the late customers can get the bargain they want.

Customers can also be grouped according to vegetable preference, which is often correlated with ethnicity. The family has loyal customers among African Americans, Russians, various groups of Asians, and Anglo Americans. Greens are popular with all the groups, but hot peppers are a particular favorite with the African American customers. The family grows at least five kinds of eggplants, four kinds of peppers, and two kinds of daikon radish. Each kind is preferred by a different group of customers.

Dealing with customers involves more than monetary transactions. Many customers need to be educated about the produce for sale, how to cook it, and how to eat it. Once customers become familiar with the produce, they often come back for more.

Once a relationship has been established, customers often make suggestions for what vegetables they would like. Sometimes they bring seeds or plants for the family to try propagating. Each group of customers has its own shopping style also. Der and Nikk enjoy bargaining with their Russian customers. "They love to bargain, but they're fun," says Der.

Marketing Strategies

The family uses a variety of strategies to compete with the other vendors at the farmers' market. Cutting prices (except at the end of the day) is **not** one of them. "If you price too low," says Der, "you will make your neighbors unhappy and you won't necessarily sell more." A key in direct marketing is to find a niche. You need something that sets your product apart from the rest. Sell something others are not selling, sell it at a different time, or package it in a unique way. You also need to listen to your customers and find out what they want. Der competes with other flower growers by making small bouquets for her customers. Her competitors generally sell either single flowers or large bouquets. Der's bouquets meet the needs of customers who only want a few, pre-selected flowers.

Der is planning to grow more perennials in the future as a way of getting an edge on the market. Perennials are not as common at the farmers' markets because they require more time to grow, and many farmers cannot afford to wait multiple years for a crop. Now that they own their own land, however, Der and Nikk are in a good position to grow perennials to fill a customer's needs that others cannot fill.

A third marketing strategy the family uses is listening to buyers. They try to grow what will sell. When they try growing a new type of vegetable or flower, they offer free samples to their customers and educate them about the vegetable. Mainly, though, they try to grow what they know will sell or what they think will sell based on past experience. "Growing the wrong thing can cost you a lot of time," says Der.

Their marketing advice to others: "Stay focused. Keep your eyes open for what is selling best, but don't try to compete with others. You can grow the same thing, but grow it at a different time to avoid competition."

Case Study 2-3: Gizdich Ranch



Location

Santa Cruz County, California

Farm size:

89 acres

Original strategy

Products: Tomatoes, boysenberries, apples

Marketing: Traditional outlets

New strategy (gradual process)

Products: Berries, berry products (jams, jellies, juice, apple pies, pumpkins, antiques, gift shop

Marketing: U-pick, on-farm sales, on-farm tours, special events

Marketing issues

Advertising, community involvement, listening to customers, other markets, challenges

For more information

Jeff Rodriguez
RC&D Coordinator
Central Coast Resource Conservation
and Development Council
545 Main Street, Suite B-1
Morro Bay, CA 93442
(805) 772-5623

Site Description and History

Nita Gizdich works on an 89-acre ranch near Watsonville, California. The farm has been in the family for 69 years. Her grandchildren are the fourth generation to live there. Her son, Vince Gizdich, took over the farm operation 7 years ago, but Nita still manages the marketing.

Gizdich Ranch lies at the base of the California coastal range foothills. The soils are nearly level to gently sloping loams formed on alluvial fans and terraces. With proper water and fertility management, they can be highly productive (USDA SCS, 1979). The climate in Santa Cruz County is characterized by warm summers and mild winters. Mean summer high temperature is often more than 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Winter minimum temperatures average 35 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The average annual precipitation is about 20 to 25 inches. Snowfall is extremely rare. This area is good for growing apples.

The farm originally produced tomatoes, boysenberries, and apples, but in 1950, when the ollalie berry (a hybrid blackberry) was introduced to California, the Gizdich family replaced their tomatoes with ollalies. They sold ollalies to wholesale processors for several years until the market dried up in the late 1950's. Faced with a large crop and nowhere to sell it, they decided to start a U-pick business. That business has now grown to a multiple-enterprise, entertainment farm that employs 28 full-time and as many as 70 seasonal employees.

To advertise their new U-pick business in 1950, the Gizdich's placed a sign by the highway that read **PicYurSef Ollalies**. They got only a few customers. One day a woman showed up wanting to know what ollalies were. When she found out they were blackberries, she was delighted and said she would have been there much sooner if she had known. When Nita and her husband changed the sign to read, **PicYurSef Blackberries (Ollalies)**, business started to improve. Berry picking lasted through June. Visitors to the farm found they could also purchase two varieties of prepicked apples in September, so some returned for the apple harvest. Based on customers' requests, the Gizdich's gradually replaced some of their existing pippin apples with more popular varieties. They replaced some ollalies with other types of berries. They also sold fresh squeezed apple juice and apple pies. Then they started an antique store and later a gift shop.

Advertising

Advertising is a critical part of marketing. Nita approaches advertising from many angles. “Some of the best advertising is by word-of-mouth,” she says, “but that is not enough.” She sends out notices to former customers twice a year and advertises in the newspaper. She is always looking for free sources of advertising and seldom turns down an opportunity to speak about farming or demonstrate how to make apple pies. If something new is happening at the farm, she’ll send news releases to TV stations, radio stations, and newspapers, and often they will pick up the story. The farm has been highlighted in several television shows and magazines. All of this advertising has resulted in expansion of farm income-producing activities. For example, Nita hosts farm tours for school children and senior groups. The farm also holds a successful Apple Butter Festival in October. Families come from great distances to taste fresh apple butter, purchase crafts, and participate in a barbecue and other family activities.

Community Involvement

Nita says, “Being active in your community is an important part of marketing.” She participates actively in a number of organizations including the local chamber of commerce, the Farm Bureau, and the Roadside Direct Marketers’ Association. She makes presentations and gives farm tours whenever they are requested. She has even had tour groups from Japan. Farm tours are particularly intense during the autumn. For 2 months, every weekday morning is devoted to school tours and every afternoon to adult tours. Nita speaks at local clubs and is involved in many activities that contribute to the community. “Not only is it being a good neighbor, it’s good advertising too,” says Nita.

Listening to Customers

Listening to customers is the primary reason that the farm has evolved to the enterprise it is today. Customers requested new apple varieties and more types of berries. The Gizdichs listened. They have 13 varieties of apples and 4 kinds of berries for sale. Customers asked to buy antique items from around the farm. They listened again, and the antique store was established. Customers wanted to buy gifts in addition to fruit so they opened a gift shop. One customer asked to have a birthday party at the farm. Now it is a regular offering where a picnic table is reserved and the birthday person gets a personalized birthday apple pie. “To be successful you need to give customers what they want,” says Nita. “This means you must listen and respond.”

Other Markets

Although most of the farm income comes from onfarm sales, the Gizdich family produces more fruit than they can sell to onfarm customers. So they also deliver apples, apple juice, apple pies, jams, jellies, and syrup to restaurants and independent groceries from Palo Alto to the Carmel Valley. They maintain a consistent product line; that is, they do not produce anything different specifically for off-farm sales. They simply sell off-farm products at wholesale prices, while the onfarm products are retail.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges Nita faces is coordinating visitors. It is important that individual visitors to the farm not feel overcrowded by bus tours, so the groups are always separated. Even farm store sales to tour groups occur in a separate location from the main farm store that serves individuals. Nita also is careful to not double-book farm tours. That way she ensures each tour gets individual attention.

Nita suggests several reasons why more farmers are not interested in onfarm, direct marketing. Insurance for such operations is quite high, permits are also expensive, and this kind of operation requires that a number of people be available to assist visitors. This means that not everyone can be in the field. Someone needs to “mind the store.” One of the biggest issues is personality, though. “You have to like people,” says Nita. “If you don’t have a people-oriented personality, it won’t work.”

You also have to recognize that it takes time to build a customer base and be able to sustain the operation while the base is building. The first year of their U-pick operation, Gizdich Ranch had no more than 50 visitors all season. Now they can have as many as 300 visitors a day.

Summary

Gizdich Ranch has been a family farm for 69 years and has included a U-pick operation for over 40 years. The farm and its enterprises have evolved as a result of responding to customer feedback. Nita Gizdich believes that advertising, listening to customers, and making customers feel welcome are three critical elements in a successful onfarm sales operation, and by almost any measure, Gizdich Ranch is very successful.

Case Study 2-4: Common Good Farm (formerly Equinox Community Supported Agriculture)



Location

Raymond, Nebraska

Farm size

2 to 3 acres (in production)

Original strategy

Products: Vegetables, pasture poultry

Marketing: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets

New strategy

Products: Vegetables (49+ kinds), herbs, pasture poultry, eggs, fruits/nuts

Marketing: Community Supported Agriculture

Marketing issues

How the CSA works, cultural methods, community support, customer focus, advertising, limitations

For more information

Dennis Schroeder
6030 South 58th St., Suite C
Lincoln, NE 68516
(402) 423-9683, ext. 5

Site Description

Ruth Chantry and Everett Lunquist, with their two children Quin (12) and Eli (4), run the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) at Common Good Farm near Raymond, Nebraska, 15 miles north of Lincoln. In 1996, they started their CSA 5 miles south of Lincoln in response to local interest. After borrowing land for 3 years, the family bought a 20-acre parcel near Raymond in 1999 and moved the CSA officially to Raymond in 2000.

Common Good Farm is located on rolling terrain. Slopes range from nearly level to 8 percent. The soils are predominantly in the Sharpsburg series. Sharpsburg soil is relatively fine-textured and fertile. This soil's greatest limitations are slow permeability and a tendency to erode if not managed properly. Only 2 to 3 acres are flat enough for vegetable production. The remainder is primarily in brome grass, clovers,

and natural vegetation of prairie grasses and riparian woodland. The family has plans to convert some of these areas to perennial fruit and flower production.

The climate near Raymond, Nebraska, is cold in the winter and hot with occasional cooler spells in the summer. Winter precipitation usually occurs as snow. The average annual precipitation is about 30 inches. Approximately 70 percent of this falls during the growing season (from April through November). However, precipitation varies significantly from year to year. Two years out of 10, the growing season precipitation is less than 19 inches. Tornadoes and severe thunderstorms strike occasionally in the spring and summer, causing localized crop damage.

Background/Goals

Ruth and Everett have been managing the CSA in Nebraska for 5 years. While neither of them grew up on a farm, both had a keen interest in farming. Before starting out on their own, they worked on a CSA in Wisconsin for 2 years, learning as much as they could about production techniques and how to conduct a CSA. Everett knew he wanted to produce food in a way that supported the economics of food and farming. He and Ruth recognized that culture is intricately tied with food. Farmers are stewards of not only the land, but of the community around them. Agribusiness produces food, but often destroys the culture/community around it by consolidating farms and displacing farmers. Everett and Ruth wanted to grow food and foster the cultural elements of community as well. Starting the CSA was a way to bring them toward their goal.

How the CSA Works

Common Good Farm is set up so that individual members pledge annually to pay a share of the economic needs of the farm and in return receive a share of the season's harvest. Shareholders pick up their produce weekly from one of two dropoff points in Lincoln or from the farm itself. Food is delivered weekly for about 25 weeks, from May through November, depending on the growing season. An early hard freeze can shorten the delivery period. Over 40 crops are produced in season. Early crops include (but are not limited to) head lettuce, chard, snow peas, scallions, spinach, Chinese cabbage, baby turnips, and radishes. Mid-season crops may include carrots, onions, summer squash, tomatoes, cucumbers, beets, beans, eggplants, peppers, sweet corn, melons, cauliflower, broccoli, and herbs. Typical late season vegetables include cabbage, potatoes, lettuce, winter squash, rutabaga, parsnips, leeks, onions, garlic, and kale. Pastured poultry broilers and eggs are sold separately from the CSA share, but can be ordered by CSA members.

Cultural Methods

Common Good Farm is certified “In Conversion to Biodynamic,” which meets all organic standards with some additional requirements. Only 45 fully certified biodynamic farms are in the United States. Biodynamic farming goes a step beyond organic farming in that it incorporates whole-farm nutrient cycling into the nonchemical concept of organic farming. While organic farming strives to improve and not degrade the soil, the goal of biodynamic farming is to improve the soil, plant, and animal resources, paying particular attention to the living nature of the farm to be environmentally sustainable.

Biodynamic certification may eventually allow Common Good Farm to charge a higher premium than organic farms for its produce. Currently, it serves as a tangible demonstration of Ruth and Everett’s commitment as stewards of the land and our food system.

Community Support

Ruth and Everett receive information and moral support for their efforts from a number of sources. Two of their greatest supporters are the local Mennonite church and the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (NSAS). When they have questions or need help, usually someone from one of these organizations can help them or lead them to someone who can.

One of Ruth and Everett’s goals is to use their operation to give back to the community as well. They have donated food to local shelters, hosted school groups and scout troops to the farm, and held seasonal festivals for members and the community. Common Good Farm hosts several potluck dinners throughout the season to give members an opportunity to get to know each other and the farm.

Consumer Focus

A major focus of the CSA is educating customers about food production and utilization. Many people are not familiar with the seasonal nature of produce. For example, in Nebraska snow peas and sweet corn ripen at different times, so using both in the same recipe is impractical. Customers often need to learn how to prepare unfamiliar produce, too.

At the end of each season, customers are asked to fill out a survey asking them which vegetables they would have liked more of, which they could have used less of, which vegetables they missed having, and what could have been done differently to meet their needs. The information from the survey is used to plan the next year’s crops.

Advertising

One of the challenges Ruth and Everett face each year is getting the word out to the public about the CSA. While the local farmers’ market is popular, CSAs are a relatively new concept. A 50 percent return rate is typical for CSAs as a whole. Common Good Farm’s retention rate fluctuates from 50 to 75 percent, sometimes higher. Some members have difficulty adjusting to using seasonally available produce in the quantities provided rather than selecting their own produce, and others have life changes that preclude their returning. One way Ruth and Everett advertise is by selling extra produce at the farmers’ market so they can talk to customers who visit their booth about the CSA and hand out brochures to interested people. They have used free advertising on a local radio station, made presentations at the local library, and had a table at the Earth Day Festival, but it all takes time.

Limitations

Time—Time is currently the greatest limiting factor on Common Good Farm. Except during workdays, which tend to involve only a fraction of the CSA members, Ruth and Everett provide all the farm labor. They have had interns in the past and found that training them was sometimes more time-consuming than doing the work themselves. The minimal stipend interns receive also limits the number of interested and qualified applicants. Marketing is also quite time-consuming, so downtime is hard to come by.

Land—Another limitation on Common Good Farm is the amount of level land available for intensive vegetable production. Much of the farm is too steep to till without risking serious erosion. Ruth and Everett are planning to utilize some of the sloping areas by planting perennial fruits such as apples, grapes, pears, raspberries and strawberries, as well as perennial flowers and rhubarb. Still the limited space will limit the number of shares they can sell.

Financial resources—Limited time and limited space could easily be overcome with unlimited financial resources. Still, Ruth and Everett continue to develop an environmentally friendly farm and are providing a valuable community service with the resources they have.

Conclusion

The CSA started in 1996 provides many elements of sustainable agriculture. It supports the family farm while providing members with nutritious seasonal food. It also gives members an opportunity to learn how their food is produced and to develop a sense of community with other members and with the farmers who produce the food. As Everett says, “The CSA is a way to put *culture* back into agriculture.”

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Trade names mentioned are for specific information and do not constitute a guarantee or warranty of the product by the Department of Agriculture or an endorsement by the Department over other products not mentioned.